

# STAY IN THE FIGHT + + +

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Well, good morning, church. Good morning. We are in week three of our series, Game On. We talked about how Jesus was a master at using images or visuals or in things of his day and bringing kingdom principles and spiritual truths out of them. And that's really what we're doing in our pixelated world video game series called Game On, specifically looking at the life and times of David in the Old Testament.

And today we're talking about probably the most iconic, if not one of the most iconic, multiplayer video games, Super Smash Bros. Is there anyone excited about Super Smash Bros. here today? Okay, I got a little work to kind of bring you into this game. So there you go, Super Smash Bros. If you've ever played it and you can see a little gameplay happening behind me, it is chaotic. It is fast paced. There's characters flying off screen, sudden comebacks. You're fighting for your life, trying to not get knocked down by or off the platform by fireballs or swords or lasers or maybe even banana peels coming at you.

Sometimes you team up with friends. Sometimes you play solo. But the goal, how do I stay on the platform for as long as I possibly can? And so there's great strategy involved in it for sure. But there's a truth in it that if you play this game, you're going to get hit. And so the question isn't, will I get knocked down? But am I going to get back up and stay on the platform? I think if you've never picked up a remote controller and played this game, you understand that this is kind of a fitting metaphor for our walk with Christ.

It feels like sometimes life in Christ that it's under attack and it's kind of coming from all sides. But we want to learn how to stay in the fight. That's today's sermon title, Stay in the Fight. David did a great job of staying in the fight. So far, we've seen David two weeks ago get anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the future king of Israel. Last week, we looked at that epic battle against Goliath.

And yet, amazingly, you would think after those two really victorious, awesome, God-inspired moments, that everything would kind of work out for David and life would be happily ever after. He'd get his kingdom and everything would be good. But there is a long period in between what happened from when David actually became king. And he teaches us how to stay in the fight.

In fact, in the next chapter of 1 Samuel, after he defeats Goliath, we're going to see the problem really is Saul is not ready to give up his throne. Verse 5 of chapter 18 says, whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops and Saul's officers as well. You get the sense that he's promoting him for popularity reasons, because like he has to.

When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, Goliath, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul, was singing and dancing with joyful songs and timbrels and lyres. And as they danced, look at the song they sang. Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands. Saul was very angry. This refrain displeased him greatly.

They've credited David with tens of thousands and me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom? And from that time on, Saul kept a close eye on David and that close eye would be jealousy, which turns into hatred, which turns into multiple murder attempts on David's life from the very King that he wants served so well.

If you look at the whole story, there is 13 chapters of David fleeing, escaping, running. It to me is pretty exhausting to read, but feels a little bit like in my generation, like a 24 episode of Jack Bauer, or maybe today Jack Ryan or Reacher or Killing Eve, where it's like the main character gets out of a near impossible situation only to find themselves in an even worse near impossible situation in the next episode. But David stays in the fight, even when life knocked him around quite a bit.

So today I want to look at four strategies to help you stay in the fight to stay in the fight of faith. And if for whatever reason you happen upon a remote controller and play the game of Super Smash Bros, these four strategies will also help you in your game there as well. Kind of a dual purpose today.

So number one, expect chaos. David likely didn't think that again, after being anointed by God and then fighting Goliath and conquering him, that it would lead to living in caves and dodging spears on the run over and over. And I think some of you were there where it's like you, you give your life to Christ and you start doing the right thing. And yet there's still all this chaos around you. And you start asking you like, is this normal? I think maybe the way we say it is, should life be this chaotic?

Really? Like there's a lot of chaos around me. And I thought that once I kind of followed Jesus life would follow suit and that life would get cleaned up a little bit and things would be easier. Is this really the abundant life God that you're calling it to? And do I even want this life? If life is this crazy, some of us are incorrectly taught that the moment we give our lives to Jesus and follow after him, that everything in life kind of will be easy, that things will go our way, that life will be up into the right, that the more faith you have and the more you follow Jesus, the more wealth, health and status you'll have.

That if you follow Jesus really well, you'll get the preferred parking at Shields or whatever your busy store is, or you'll get random checks mailed to you for the right amount for what you need. Or maybe even you'll find a Bitcoin on the ground. I'm not sure that it works that way, but you get what I'm saying, right? And we've actually done quite a few sermons on spiritual warfare. We did one a year ago called Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table, all about how the enemy attacks.

And so just as a quick reminder, I need to tell you that some of the chaos is because many, much of the chaos is because the enemy is attacking you. The enemy does not attack what is not a threat, but the moment you jump from being a spectator and into a player or a participant, you ought to expect the enemy's going to bring as much chaos as he can into your life, because he is trying to keep you from pursuing God's will. That is not bad theology. That is good theology. And that is normal in the Christian life.

And so life isn't about just avoiding all hits, but here's maybe a truth that we don't speak about enough when it comes to chaos: there are some times where it is yes, purely an attack from the enemy. And that is the reason there's so much chaos in your life. But we have to also admit that there are some times where it's actually not the enemy. And it's God placing us into a position of chaos to accomplish his will.

If Jesus is not just our Lord and Savior, but he's also our model and our example, which he is, then we have to look at the hard truth that there was a time where Jesus was on the center stage of the world with his hands spread out, nailed to a cross. And it was in that moment where Jesus was paying for sins of the world, not because he did one himself, not because he did anything wrong. He had done everything right. And it still led him to this moment.

And it was in this moment on the cross where Jesus actually does not blame the enemy for the chaos that he is in, for that is going on in his life right then. But instead he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Which amazingly are words penned by not just the slinger, but the songwriter David a thousand years earlier in Psalm 22, when David says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I do not find rest."

If God were to allow his Son to be crucified like that, the only begotten Son of the world, we have to think that yes, the enemy is going to try to bring chaos to keep us from pursuing God's will. But there are times when God will put us in chaos to accomplish his will. Maybe one thing you just need to hear is God's will will be accomplished. His will will be accomplished.

The enemy is going to try to keep us away from that. God is going to try to move us towards that. And there are times where God places us not in safe, comfortable, controlled situations. Even with the Israelites, the people that David would reign, we have to look at their story and say that there was a period of time where God did rescue them out of the chaos of the Egyptians, but he dropped them into the promised land, into the center of the world, if you will, not into some quiet corner or some safe little hamlet away from the drama of the world, but actually right in the center and said to them, "You'll be a kingdom of priests that through you, you will show the rest of the world who I am."

It's not a safe place. That's not a controlled place. God will often put us in the fray, not away from it. And there's a phrase that I don't think is true. Our students on Wednesday nights have been doing a series and they call the series, "God ain't say that." And while I want to correct their grammar, the point of the series is they're looking at things that God never said that maybe they think God said.

And so I just want to throw one into the mix of "God ain't say that." And maybe you've heard this phrase before that the safest place to be is in the center of God's will. Garbage. I do not see that to be biblical truth or practically in our lives, but rather there are times when you are completing God's will or accomplishing God's will. And it's because of that that you're in a dangerous place.

And so because Jesus went to the cross and he and he alone was forsaken by God, you and I have the promise that he'll never leave us or forsake us. So the truth is, no matter where you are, God's will doesn't guarantee safety. It guarantees his presence and that's better than safety.

But make no mistake about it. We are meant to be a people that bring God's will. The enemy wants to keep us away from it. God wants to position us towards it. And accomplishing God's will many times happens to be right in the middle of chaos.

Number two, we're going to expect chaos, but number two, we're going to chase failure. Chase failure. That's an interesting phrase. Here's one thing I've noticed. It's obvious, but if you never press start or play Super Smash Bros, you're not going to win.

Again, the moment you in that game and in your spiritual life go away from being a spectator and turn into a player, well, then that's probably where some fear comes, some doubt comes and some questions come. Like, do I have what it takes to accomplish this? But we have to press start and not just watch others from the sidelines.

There's an author. His name is Ryan Leake and he wrote a book called Chasing Failure. And in this book, he talks about the chance encounter, rare opportunity he had to meet the legend, the Black Mamba, Kobe Bryant. And in a short conversation with Kobe Bryant, Kobe Bryant asked Ryan Leake this question, a great question you should think about, "If you knew you couldn't fail, what would you do?"

If you knew that you couldn't fail, what would you do? And the moment Kobe asked Ryan this, he couldn't let that phrase go. Well, if I knew I couldn't fail, he said, well, I would pursue my childhood dream to play in the NBA. But Ryan was 28 at the time, never played college ball. And the best basketball he played over the last six years was as local YMCA pickup.

And there's some good local YMCA basketball, but there is a talent gap between YMCA and NBA. But it was my dream and I never actually went for it. And so Ryan did something crazy. He decided I'm going to chase this dream, even if it means I'm going to fail miserably and I'm going to document it for others to see.

And so he did something wild and he wrote all 30 NBA general managers and he said this, "My name is Ryan Leake. I'm not a professional basketball player. I didn't play college ball, but I've trained like crazy. And I'm asking you for one opportunity, just one NBA tryout, not even because I think I'll make the team, but because I want to chase failure. I want to learn what I'm made of by taking a shot I have no business taking. And I want to share that journey with others."

Mailed them out and kind of to his surprise received letters back. Of course, they were rejection letters. It's a crazy idea. But one letter came from the Phoenix Suns and coach Jeff Hornacek, where he said, okay, I'll take you up on that offer. And Ryan hopped on a plane the very next day and went down to Phoenix.

And again, he's a good player. You can find some good players in pickup basketball around. But the moment he tried out, it was pretty obvious and clear. This guy's got nowhere near the talent of an NBA player. And he was documenting the whole thing. Obviously, the video is on YouTube and he's trying to help people see a powerful truth that you can learn a lot through trying.

Here's his phrase that really stuck out to me is, "You can learn more chasing failure than you can chasing success." If you fast forward Ryan's story, it's kind of neat. A decade later, he does work in the NBA. Not as a basketball player, but as a public speaker, a consultant and an encourager to quite a few of the NBA teams. More aligned with his gifts.

And it probably wouldn't have happened if he hadn't chased failure. Faith is not always about chasing safe outcomes. And so again, there are times when the enemy will bring chaos to keep you from God's

will. There are times where God will put you in the middle of chaos to accomplish his will. And there are times that I'm saying it's wise for you to actually step into the chaos and chase something God puts on your heart even if you're not guaranteed worldly success.

It doesn't mean that you won't have fear. It doesn't mean that there will be no doubts. It will have questions attached to it. But it's how we stay in the fight. David said it this way, "I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side." Remember that song David has slain his tens of thousands. Well, he said I'm not going to fear even though I got 10,000 around me.

I think David wrote Psalm 23, the most popular Psalm about the battle of Goliath. And verse 4 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Now, I don't know if David actually had no fear. I tend to think that he did have fear. And that he's writing these things and reminding himself of these spiritual godly truths to kind of ramp himself up for the battle, if you will. But he had to press start. He had to jump away from being a spectator and be a player. He had to chase what others would say you're doomed to fail.

But every time you follow Jesus, you do grow when you show up. And so much of it is just will you show up? Will you keep fighting? And of all people, we who have the Holy Spirit. That's what the Bible says, that anyone who believes in Jesus has the power of the Holy Spirit inside of them. The same power, Romans says, that rose Jesus from the dead lives in you and me.

And so if anyone in this world is called to go into drama and into chaotic situations and into things that others would fail on, is it not the people of God? We have his power working in us. We have his power working in us. And so expect chaos, chase failure.

Number three, get a player two. One of the most underappreciated features of Smash Bros is co-op mode that you can fight with a partner. That you can guard one another and you can take turns and when one is down, but maybe not out, the other one can be more prominent. And you can actually help one another and you can hold ground at times and you can play offense at times and you can play defense at times, but we are better together.

That's not just a gaming principle. That's a spiritual principle as well. David had a number two. He had a player two actually happened to be Saul's son, Jonathan. First Samuel chapter 20 verse 17. It says, "Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him because he loved him as he loved himself."

Again, as I mentioned, there's 13 chapters where David is actively dealing with escape and hiding and the threat of King Saul, but his friend and ally, Jonathan helped him. He helped him escape. He warned him of danger, protected and encouraged him even at the expense of his relationship with his dad. He had a clear number two.

And friends, you are not meant to do this life alone. In fact, if you look in scripture at the very first five Hebrew words that God tells to mankind translated, it turns into 10 words in English. These words are, "It is not good for the man to be alone."

You and I were not wired or ever meant to be alone. If you need another verse, Solomon, David's son wrote this verse, "Two are better than one. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."

And we're living in a day and a time where more and more people are focusing on their individuality and thinking that they don't need a human to human connection. And it's easier than ever to just shut our garage doors and to be entertained and pleasure ourselves to whatever our pleasures might be until we fall asleep and wake up the next day.

And it's dangerous, the world we're living in, because you are not wired to be alone. And already with a pretty early rise of artificial intelligence, something has already shifted. Sadly, that artificial intelligence in its infancy has already moved away from, it used to be that the number one method or form of using artificial intelligence was informational. And it's already shifted to now it's for companionship and relational.

And I'm not saying you can't use generative pre-trained transformers in your life, but you are not wired to be in relationship with generative pre-trained transformers. And it may sound silly, but there's a lot of people that are falling for that. Do you have a number two?

In our church, we have an e-sports champion, actually. His name is Sawyer McAllister. I see him here at our Millard campus today, and he's a state champion for Super Smash Bros. And some of you might, what's e-sports? It's electronic sports. Think of it as professional athletics for video games. And this does happen where there are rooms across our nation and even stadiums across our world that get packed to watch people play video games.

And there are a number of people, believe it or not, that actually play video games as their career and are successful. But this is probably one of the greatest games in e-sports because you get to play it as a team. You get to join together. It's built for community.

And again, this is not just a gaming principle. It's a spiritual principle. The battles that we face in life were not meant to be fought alone. David had a Jonathan. If you look at how Jesus sent the disciples out, Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. Even Paul on the missionary journeys always had an ally and a partner.

Heck, you can even go in the Old Testament, the book of Genesis. It's probably why Moses sent the animals out two by what? That's a trick question. Moses didn't send the animals. It was Noah. I wanted to make sure you're with me. You need good theology, people.

And so, a couple of weeks ago, we said God's given you a mission. Last week, we said he's armed you with weapons. For some of you, though, maybe the biggest takeaway you have today is, I need a player two. I need a player two. I wasn't designed to walk the spiritual life alone. I need someone that I can walk with and pray with, someone in my corner to encourage me, to lift me up.

Someone I can go into co-op mode with. I want to encourage you. We're starting a new season of connect groups in just a couple of weeks. So, we're literally building these groups of people right now as we speak. These are groups that study the Bible, and that's a primary function of our connect groups so that we can connect with God.

But a secondary purpose that's right alongside of it is so that we can connect with each other. So that we can have someone in life that we can fight with. When you fight alone, you're really vulnerable. But when we can fight together, we're stronger. We can do more.

So, we're going to expect chaos. We're going to chase failure. We're going to get a player two. Finally, our fourth. If we can skip to that slide. Don't look for shortcuts. A little advice for you here.

Here's the kicker in David's story. Even though Saul is hunting him, and David would get multiple chances to end Saul's life. There's a chapter, 1 Samuel 24, where David, as he's being hunted by Saul, Saul goes into a cave. And David could have actually destroyed him there as Saul is in a vulnerable place doing bathroom work in the cave.

And David decides, it's not my time. Because he knows this truth. That how you rise matters as much as if you rise. And sometimes the reason people can't stay in the fight is because you weren't prepared for what the fight brought to you.

So, let me say it this way. It would be foolish of me. Especially if you watched the gameplay earlier, which was my gameplay, which was atrocious. It would be foolish of me to challenge Saul in a 1v1 competition. I'd get destroyed. I would need to be prepared and get ready for that.

And there are times in life where sometimes we're not ready, but we think we are. And it reveals things about us, about our inside, about our character that isn't in the place where it needs to be. And so some of you might think, well, Zach, you're kind of sending conflicting messages today. Because just a few minutes ago, you were told, you told us to chase failure and to take risks and to step into things that maybe others wouldn't. And now you're saying like, but be smart and be careful about it. And I'm, yeah, I'm kind of like, yes, I think there's a time for both.

And the point of all of this is, it's really hard to live a spiritual life walking with Christ if you're not in Christ. And if you're not led by his Holy Spirit. And if you don't understand who he is, then there's going to be times when you do step into things when you're not ready. And maybe you don't step into things that you were ready for.

And it's not always easy to know which one's which. And that's why being in relationship with God and not looking for shortcuts is one of the most important things we can hear in our life. David had to wait 15 years before he became the king of Judah and another seven and a half years before he would become king of all of Israel. 22 and a half years is a long time to wait.

And who knows what would have happened if he'd have taken Saul out on the potty that day and gotten the throne. Maybe he wouldn't have been ready. Maybe it wouldn't have happened the way God wanted. So think about like, cause we're all kind of there. Like what's your posture when in David's case, he's been anointed by the pastor, but still dirty in the pasture. What's our posture when we've got a calling from God, but it's not quite ours or maybe hasn't come into reality yet.

What do we do? We work on a relationship with God. We spend time with him to kind of know who he is and who God's called us to be. So that we don't get to a place that we're meant to be, but we got there too early.



So maybe a way to explain it would be, and I'm going to stereotype here a little bit, but I think not long ago, older generations, especially, there was a rise in the Christian church of what we call the prosperity gospel. How many of you have heard about the prosperity gospel? Raise your hands, all campuses. How many of you have heard the prosperity gospel? Quite a few folks.

And it's pretty simple. I've actually already talked about it today in a sense of the more you follow Jesus or the more faith you have, the more material health, wealth, and status that you'll get in this world. That things will be up and to the right and bigger houses and fancier cars and parking spots at whatever your department store is. And if you're not seeing those, well, maybe your faith isn't as strong as it ought to be.

And the message is tempting as it is, leaves a lot of people who said yes to Jesus feeling disappointed and disillusioned because, well, life's not that clean. And Jesus actually said in this world, "You will have trouble."

And that's by the way, what bad theology does. Bad theology, it ruins us, it harms us, but good theology, even if it's hard, brings comfort. And so, yes, you're going to have hard times, but we learned about the prosperity gospel.

Whereas I would say today that the prosperity gospel isn't dead, but it's morphed into other gospels, if you will. And I think one that's really prominent against stereotyping in the younger generations is this thing that my friend Grant Skelton calls the platform gospel. That what older generations generally chased, which is wealth and status and possessions, younger generations, there's still some that struggle with that, are now more chasing influence and likes and follows and shares and video views and those things.

And they think that if I can get a platform, then I'll be seen and then I'll be known and then I'll matter. But what Grant Skelton says that goes along with it, coming back to the shortcut languages, is Jesus is not a stepping stone. He's the cornerstone.

Jesus is not a shortcut for you to get something of this world at thinking that the thing of this world is actually the best thing. It is a thing of this world. And if you get it, if you get wealth or status or possessions, if you get influence or video views or shares, good for you. But that's not the point.

The point is that through it all, you get Jesus and you get to be in a relationship with him. And I love that so many are looking to make a difference for God. Kind of want to let their light shine and have that influence. But my advice to you is this. Get planted before you get a platform.

Because roots sustain what stages reveal. And some of you may want to screenshot that. I struggle with this because when you start craving or wanting the stage or the platform, more than you care about being planted in a relationship with Jesus where he is the vine and I get to be a branch and apart from him I can do no thing.

What a shame it is when people get a platform without being planted in Christ. And that chaos without that inner character will crush you. If David were to have taken the throne, he could have. But he might have lost his soul in the process.



Waited 22 and a half years. And there's some things that God has for you and he still has them for you. But he's preparing you so that when you get that thing, whatever that thing is, you're the person that God has called you and wants you to be.

And there's a generation that's so eager to be seen and known that they've forgotten the importance that you are already seen and known. And you are being formed by God himself.

And here's where maybe one last Smash metaphor can help. In the game, there are no shortcuts. You can't press one magic button and win. But there are these things in the gaming world known as key binds. And what a key bind is is when you bind a couple of keys or multiple keys together. And in Smash Bros when you do several buttons together at the right time, it'll give you a special combo or a unique attack.

And as you practice these and learn these, you can use these in competition to ultimately defeat the opponent. And I like that image and I kind of want you to think about, I want you to think about what might be spiritual key binds for you.

That all of them are good on their own but when you start stacking them together, I'm talking like spiritual discipline, spiritual habits like praying and getting in the word of God daily and worshipping weekly and serving and getting in connect groups and fasting.

But when you do these things together, what's happening is you're building and you're planting and you're growing in your relationship with Jesus so that when the platform or the stage comes, you're actually ready for it.

Make no mistake about it, stages and platforms look different and it's not always public platforms that I'm talking about. But God did design each and every one of you for influence. Jesus himself said that you are to be one that shines your light in darkness so that others would glorify God.

So you were meant for platform, you were meant for influence, you were meant for light. But get planted before you get a platform.

Stay in the fight. It's not always easy. And, you know, we can look to Sawyer for Super Smash Bros, how to do that well. We can look for David in the Old Testament but ultimately, right, we look to Jesus.

Jesus willingly walked into chaos, chased failure that this world had never seen anybody come back from. And as he was hanging on the cross, could have taken a shortcut, called down angels, gotten off the cross.

And we would have read about that in history books today if he did that. But he didn't take that shortcut, instead did the hard route, got planted so far down into the depths of hell that he would rise up again on the third day so that his ultimate battle and his victory becomes ours.

So how do you stay in the fight? Expect chaos. Are you bracing for chaos in your life? Treat it as normal. Chase failure. Are you chasing big things? Are you trying to avoid failure? Get a player two. Do you have someone in life that you're walking with? Don't look for shortcuts. Are you planted in Christ? Are you planted in Christ?

Whichever one of those four that you feel like, you know what, I have the most room to grow. My challenge for you this week is do something in that this week.

Lord, we want to stay in the fight together. It's a fight we're willing to stay in. Because we know that when we fight for you, we fight not alone but with your power. And we fight as one church family.

We know you're going to do great things through us and that our light for you is going to shine. And so Lord, I do pray that you would raise up fighters, warriors, men and women, boys and girls of all ages.

We love you, Jesus. It's in your name we pray and together we say, amen.